

## **Biblical Truth in the Context of New Modes of Thinking**

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The following anecdote illustrates the problem we face in transmitting truth and values to the next generation. A young student with a brilliant intellect enters a computer network in a foreign country with his password, downloads the log-in and password files with approximately 3500 names and passwords and passes them through a cracking program which he has downloaded from the internet in order to crack the passwords. After he has been caught, he acts surprised that anyone could find anything inappropriate in his actions. His philosophy: there is no moral problem in breaking into or entering a house that does not belong to you. You can roam about, looking at anything you like, especially the hidden things that take some ingenuity to find, and you are fine as long as you do not take anything with you or do any damage to the house. If you also do this with the intent to demonstrate the security loopholes to the owner, you should be commended and praised for such action. At the same time the young man is a good Christian and claims to follow the Biblical standards for moral behavior. He is a typical representative of the new computer generation, born with a computer-mouse in his hand. He is also a typical representative of those who have the “new mind.”

This paper seeks to briefly address three related issues: first, the question of how new scientific evidence about a “new mind” can and does affect the thinking, especially among the younger generation; second, how this new mind deals with biblical and Adventist faith; and finally, how truth and values can be transmitted successfully in these postmodern times.

### **The New Mind**

It has been known for quite some time that our brains have altered lately in their way of processing stimulation. Studies which tested a large number of people have shown that the brain has established new limits for stimulation. At first

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only the senses of smell and taste were affected, but since the early eighties scientists have found that now all sensory perceptions are included. This means that now it has become increasingly difficult to stimulate certain centers in the brain. The brain, in fact, refuses to respond to a large number of stimuli. It has been found that our sensitivity for stimulation drops about one percentage point per year, which means that finer stimuli are filtered out and only the coarser thrills are registered.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time the brain apparently has made changes in its internal strategy. Psychophysicologists who are working in the field of behavioral neurobiology have found many indications that new and strong stimuli are processed differently than before. It can be observed that interlinks are reduced and the capacity is increased considerably through parallel stimulation lines. Before, a visual stimulus, for example, was processed through various parts of the brain and may have also activated the sense of smell. Now it seems that whole sections of the brain are skipped and the visual stimulus goes directly and exclusively to the visual center in the brain. The advantage is that the other areas of the cortex remain free for the processing of specific stimuli while the visual stimulus reaches its goal with high speed. The disadvantage is that the stimulus is only insufficiently or not at all interlinked and provided with emotions. This has serious consequences, because information is processed in the “new brain,” or better the “new mind,” without being evaluated!<sup>2</sup>

Some scientists claim that when it comes to changes of the mind a generational gap can be observed. Those born before 1949 apparently have what has been called the “old mind.” Those born between 1949 and 1969 have a “modified old mind,” while those born after 1969 have already been provided with the “new mind.” Of course, it has to be noted that this kind of conclusion is largely based on evolutionary ideas which hold that changes in influence and behavioral patterns eventually result in modifications in organic structure. While this may

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<sup>1</sup> The information provided in this section is largely taken from Michael Kneissler, “Unser Gehirn baut sich soeben radikal um,” *PM* 11 (1993): 14-20. *P.M.* is a German monthly magazine on popular science. The following books are highly recommended for additional reading on the same subject: Jane M. Healy, *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990); idem, *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds—for Better and Worse* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998); Marva J.I Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> To illustrate, when so-called “flesher videos” of “snuff flicks” (where real people are being tortured and dismembered and killed in front of the camera) are shown to adults, they feel compassion, abhorrence, and revulsion. Most of them refuse to continue watching the film. However, most children do not have the same problem. Apparently without emotion, they merely judge the dramatic quality and excitement of the action. If they find these to be acceptable, they continue to watch; if not, they turn it off, and that's it. There seems to be no moral evaluation or empathy.

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be true in some instances, the brain is structurally the same for everybody: about 20 billion cells with up to 100 billion bits input per second, which amounts to 100 billion decisions every second! Therefore the idea that people are already born with a different kind of brain or mind which predisposes them to a certain kind of thinking or behavior has to be questioned. However, it seems to be true that the rapid increase of stimuli and the immense influx of information in today's world, coupled with a diminished ability or willingness to evaluate these stimuli and information, leads to changes in the processing and storing of information in the mind.

Noteworthy in this respect, and especially for our context here, is the fact that long-term studies<sup>3</sup> have shown how the "new mind" works. Because of parallel circuits and link-ups it is able to accept and store different stimuli concurrently and independently. This leads to an increased acceptance of dissonance. One psychologist comments: "These young people have grown up with contradictions and are able to handle them."<sup>4</sup> Earlier the same ability would have been called schizophrenia, but today it has become normal. Someone has called this the "new indifference." This is the capability of the parts of the mind to reconcile the irreconcilable and to give everything equal validity simply by the refusal of the mind to relate contradicting information to each other.<sup>5</sup> It seems obvious that this is largely due to the overstimulation in our world today. This means that the mind is confronted with an increasingly broad spectrum of stimulation in less and less time: the quality and emotional impact of the stimulation changes more and more rapidly. This results in what has been called the "flickering of the senses." The mind has lost the standards by which to judge the incoming information and consequently gives in to a new "dialectic of sensory processing." The mind is merely busy with processing the waves of stimulation and stores opposing and contradictory information uncensored. It does not produce a synthesis.

#### **The New Mind and Thinking**

As Daniel Goleman has pointed out in his highly informative book *Emotional Intelligence*, "emotion is so crucial to effective thought, both in making wise decisions and in simply allowing us to think clearly."<sup>6</sup> He mentions a study that was done with primary school boys who had above-average IQ scores but

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<sup>3</sup> These studies are conducted by the Association for Rational Psychology in Munich. Every five years 4000 people are tested concerning their processing of sensual stimulation. These tests are standardized and highly sophisticated and are therefore considered reliable.

<sup>4</sup> Henner Ertel, quoted in the above mentioned article in *P.M.*

<sup>5</sup> Kneissler thinks a good illustration is young people who use spray cans and fight the depletion of the ozone layer at the same time.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 27.

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nevertheless were doing poorly in school. Neuropsychological tests showed that they had impaired frontal cortex functioning, i.e., the parts of the brain that control the emotions and are interlinked with the other thinking processes were not working properly. “Despite their intellectual potential,” Goleman writes, “these are the children at highest risk for problems like academic failure, alcoholism, and criminality—not because their intellect is deficient, but because their control over their emotional life is impaired.”<sup>7</sup> If the current overstimulation leaves the brain impaired in its vital processes, as has been pointed out above, it follows that the lack of emotional intelligence also impairs the thinking processes which are so important when it comes to accepting and evaluating information. Goleman quotes Dr. Damasio, a neurologist at the University of Iowa, who argues that people who have lost access to their emotional learning are greatly handicapped in their rational decision making. He says: “The emotional brain is as involved in reasoning as is the thinking brain.”<sup>8</sup>

The fascination with computers, which have made life so easy and yet so dependent on machines, has led to a new understanding of the world we live in. It has become so much smaller in human perception, but at the same time it has become more difficult to grasp. “Virtual reality” is not reality, and many young people have no appreciation for reality any more and have difficulty relating to real things and people.<sup>9</sup> We hail the breathtaking progress that the electronic information highway has brought, and rightly so: it would be wrong (and hypocritical) to denounce it all as bad. However, we cannot close our eyes to the negative effects this development has on people and on their thinking, and consequently on their lives. As already mentioned, science has pointed out that the vast amount of information that is entering the brain every single day is processed and stored in such a way that it becomes increasingly difficult to evaluate it properly.

One important result of this new processing in the new mind has led to a new logic. Classical logic has always maintained that a is not non-a, what Aristotle called the Law of Non-Contradiction. All arguments and propositions that lead to acceptable and livable conclusions are based on that kind of logic. Paul and other biblical writers employed logical reasoning in order to convince others of the correctness of their faith and their belief system. The new logic is prepared to question all of that. A can now be non-a, as long as their contradiction

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>9</sup> For example, what drives a young Christian girl to give her body measurements and her phone number to a chat partner, somebody she has never seen or heard but is willing to confide in enough to reveal private matters? The computer provides a certain kind of anonymity which protects but also makes for social distance and indifference.

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is not felt too hard in everyday life. This leads to pluralism in the thinking of the individual, not just in a group or church.

All of this naturally ties in with postmodern thinking, which, according to most researchers in the history of philosophy, began with the social revolution at the end of the 1960s. Is it coincidence that according to researchers in the field of behavioral neurobiology those born after 1969 supposedly have the new mind? Could there be a correlation between postmodern philosophy and the way the mind works? As is well known, the most important “unbelief” of postmodernism is that there is no unchanging, ultimate, or absolute truth. “Modernists did not believe the Bible is true. Postmodernists have cast out the category of truth altogether.”<sup>10</sup> Even scientific knowledge is not beyond suspicion any more, since it is “biased and socially constructed. That is, truths are relative and depend on what one’s culture regards as truth.”<sup>11</sup> Postmoderns are wary of many things that were hallmarks of the modern age but most of all of anyone who tells them what is right and wrong.<sup>12</sup>

Naturally, “such an epistemic shift to thoroughgoing epistemological relativism”<sup>13</sup> would have a radical impact on hermeneutics. The issues of the definition of truth and its relation to the cultural context, of the interpreter and the production of meaning, as well as of the authority of Scripture and pluralism have become part and parcel of the postmodern paradigm.

**The New Mind and Truth**

The question that must be raised now in the context of this paper is: how does the new mind affect the search for truth? How does it relate to biblical doctrine, to spirituality, to Adventism? If it is true that the information overload and the resulting overstimulation has an impact on the reasoning of unbelievers, it would be naive to think that believers are exempt from these issues and problems. Since we do not follow the evolutionist model, we do not hold the view

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<sup>10</sup> Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Loving God with all your Mind* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987), 192.

<sup>11</sup> David L. Goetz, “The Riddle of Our Postmodern Culture,” *Leadership* 18 (1997): 54.

<sup>12</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 20: “If one cannot talk about the objective truth of the matter, then the interpretations are merely personal or at best culturally conditioned options. No interpretation can be dismissed, and no interpretation can be allowed the status of objective truth. To dismiss an interpretation presupposes you have some criterion to allow you to do so—and if an interpretation is merely one among many possible interpretations, it is pointless to argue for its unique worth or against the equal validity (or nonvalidity!) of another’s interpretation. On the other hand, if you claim the criterion is the truth itself, you betray an old-fashioned bigotry, your enslavement to an eclipsed modernity. You have failed to recognize the subjectivity of all interpretations, the significance of the ‘turn to the subject.’”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

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that the neurobiological changes with regard to the brain and the mind should lead to the conclusion that the individual is not to be held responsible for his or her decisions and actions. Rather, the insights from science help us understand better the complex situation the younger generation is facing today; they help us see more clearly the reason why there is such widespread acceptance of opposing and even contradictory views among young people today.

Taking the additional factor of the current postmodern paradigm into consideration, it is no wonder that a new mind, backed by a new world view, would also view biblical faith and Adventism differently than we are used to. A recent article in an independent Adventist magazine speaks of “a fundamental change . . . taking place in the religious and theological needs of younger members of the church . . . [there is] a need to reinterpret the basic tenets and presuppositions of traditional Adventist theology in order to make them meaningful, applicable and relevant to the current social and cultural situation.”<sup>14</sup> The new mind is clearly visible in the following statement: “What does the ideal young adult theology look like? *It is the same as always, but different!*”<sup>15</sup> The author then lists a number of points where he thinks young adult Adventist theology is different. Sincerity and authenticity are extremely important; therefore young adults are more concerned with the principle than the letter of the law. For example, community and fellowship are more important than the notion of breaking the Sabbath. The new mind? It wants to keep the Sabbath as a principle but discards the notion of commitment to biblical truth, even if that means that the very principle of the Sabbath is violated.

According to the author of the article, young adults also care very little about missionizing and converting others to some notion of absolute truth. They are, however, very concerned with social outreach and even desire to share their personal views about religion, “but this desire is not accompanied by the notion that one truth is truer than others. . . . subjectivity is important.”<sup>16</sup> He continues with this insightful statement: “Most of the young adults I know spend little time thinking about traditional Adventist understandings of the imminent end of the world. *Not that they completely discard such teachings, but they simply do not emphasize them.* Apocalyptic scenarios aren’t very helpful for constructing positive ways in which to deal with people on a daily basis.”<sup>17</sup> The new mind? It seriously believes that it is possible to hold on to some doctrine or belief without emphasizing it, which is tantamount to saying it is not important, and therefore it

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<sup>14</sup> Rubén René Dupertuis, “Young Adults Make Adventism Their Own,” *Adventist Today* (March-April 1997), 20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 (emphasis supplied).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis supplied).

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*could* be discarded! The new mind simply is not willing to fully reflect on things. If it would, and if it would also adhere to some form of classical logic, it would rather quickly arrive at an either-or position.

Young adults also “are more concerned with being fulfilled spiritually than in taking part in traditional church activities.”<sup>18</sup> The same sentiment is borne out in another article about the needs of the younger Adventist generation, in which the author lists “10 things Generation X Adventists want from a Church Worship Experience.”<sup>19</sup> What is most striking is the fact that the list does not contain one single hint to what God wants; it is, rather, a wish list of what humans want from God when they worship Him. The new mind? It is so preoccupied with processing the information overload that it has lost the capability to evaluate the incoming information. Since it is not evaluated, the influx of stimulation breeds the egotistical notion of relevancy: Something can only be good if it feels good and “makes sense.”<sup>20</sup> Something that is not relevant is not true.

While rejecting objectivity, postmodernism is more interested in the supernatural, but not on the basis of biblical revelation. There is a different paradigm of spirituality. “The old paradigm taught that if you have the right teaching, you will experience God. The new paradigm says that if you experience God, you will have the right teaching.”<sup>21</sup>

The typical intellectual inconsistency of the new mind can also be seen in the notion of de-emphasizing doctrine while emphasizing spirituality at the same time. One striking phenomenon of the postmodern and pluralistic mindset which is hardly ever noticed is the increasing openness towards spirituality without the foundation of biblical truth. I am not so much referring to the strong influence of New Age and Eastern philosophy, which has replaced many Christian and biblical ideas in the Western world, especially among the generation on the executive floors of national and international corporations. Certainly this has a strong impact on the philosophical landscape and contributes to postmodern thinking, which favors individual experience. However, I am rather thinking of the attempt to dismantle the authority of the Bible and its exclusive truth claim on the one hand and yet to experience spiritual depth in practical terms on the other. This particular attitude is especially noticeable in two of the most prominent

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Steve Daily, “The Lazarus Generation: Listening to and Believing in Generation X,” *Adventist Today* (September-October 1996), 15-16.

<sup>20</sup> Dupertuis, 21: “[Young adults’] theology is rooted in the tradition of their forebears but is articulated and *put into practice in a way that makes sense in their time*” (emphasis supplied). It is rather striking to see that this very idea pops up throughout the article; in fact, it is the main point. Of course, those growing up in the seventies believed the same of themselves.

<sup>21</sup> Leith Anderson, *A church for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1992), 20, quoted in Veith, 211.

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existentialist theologians of our century, Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich. While both of these men took a very critical stand on the Bible—the scope of this paper does not allow for an elaboration here—they both sought deep spiritual experience, so much so that it stunned observers. Bultmann believed until his end that the critical honesty and objective doubts of rationalism, which his father came to embrace while Rudolf was a student,<sup>22</sup> could not be separated from the deep inner knowledge of his mother’s pietism.<sup>23</sup> While Tillich rigorously subjected the knowledge of truth and Scripture to his own rational philosophy, he nevertheless delivered powerful sermons from the pulpit, talking as if he believed that the events recounted in Scripture really happened. “Tillich as a preacher is infinitely more faithful to the Word than Tillich the system-builder.”<sup>24</sup> Colin Brown concludes: “At bottom there seem to be two Tillichs.”<sup>25</sup>

This dichotomy is startling and somewhat discomfoting, since it shows that apparently it is possible for the human mind to disassociate an alleged personal faith experience from the faith in the truthfulness of the Bible. I wonder if Bultmann and Tillich should not be reckoned among postmodern thinkers, because their existentialist philosophy, and particularly their dichotomizing, resembles postmodern thought and practice.

#### **The New Mind and the Transmission of Truth and Values**

There can be no doubt about the difficulties we are facing when we attempt to minister to the young mind. As we have seen, philosophically and organizationally the new mind is a formidable obstacle to biblical truth, especially because of the rejection of absolutes (postmodernism) and the increasing inability to interconnect information into a whole concept and evaluate that information (the new mind). But there is hope! There is no need to give up in the face of the daunting task to transmit biblical and Adventist values to young people.

I would like to suggest ten points that should be kept in mind:

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<sup>22</sup> The impact his father’s radical shift from believer to doubter had on Rudolf Bultmann can be seen in the fact that he always remembered the exact date when it happened.

<sup>23</sup> See the account of Bultmann’s life and thought by his student Walter Schmithals, “Wissenschaftliche Wahrhaftigkeit und innere Wahrhaftigkeit: Zum 100. Geburtstag von Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1984),” *Charisma und Institution*, ed. Trutz Rendtorff (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1985), 368-380. Schmithals, on p. 380, also recounts the comment by Bultmann on the last stanza of a well-known German hymn that was sung to him and his wife one evening by several of his students. Repeating the words by heart, Bultmann said that he considered it the most beautiful prayer he knew. The stanza reads in English: “God, make us see your salvation and not trust in earthly things, not follow after vanity; make us simple [in believing] and pious and joyful before you on this earth.”

<sup>24</sup> George H. Tavad, *Paul Tillich and the Christian Message* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962), 139.

<sup>25</sup> Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1969), 200.

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1. We have to present biblical truth as a wholistic truth. In recent years doctrines have come into disrepute, many times not even so much because of specific teachings they entail but because we live in an age where doctrine *per se* is viewed as dry, boring, irrelevant, and divisive. People have sadly learned to dichotomize Jesus and theology, love and doctrine. “*Love* is understandable—warm and fuzzy. *Doctrine*, on the other hand, sounds cold, difficult, and demanding.”<sup>26</sup> Theology’s bad reputation has caused widespread illiteracy on even basic beliefs among evangelical Christians and Adventists. This ignorance and demise of doctrine has also led to an impoverished spiritual life, since “a person who does not know what is available to him or her does not know enough to seek it out and receive it.”<sup>27</sup> Spirituality needs a sound theological foundation, lest it become a shallow and merely mystical experience.

While it is true that this deplorable situation has come about because “we have taught it [doctrine] as a cognitive system of facts about God and have separated it from the most vital issues of life,”<sup>28</sup> another and even more significant reason lies in the dichotomy of doctrine and the person of Jesus Christ, which in turn is caused by today’s deterioration of the authority of Scripture and the resultant haphazard use of the Bible in Christian circles. It is little wonder that if something is ripped apart that actually is inseparable, the parts will be deficient if looked at just by themselves and not in relation to the other part. But this is exactly what has happened with Jesus and His doctrines, which in fact are nothing less than the expression of what He really is. Since a Jesus that has been reduced by leaving out the importance of doctrine is a “tame Jesus of love,” an unbiblical notion, the trend to a relativistic and pluralistic theology is encouraged. After all, doctrine does not really matter anymore. Likewise, if doctrine is severed from the person of Jesus Christ, it tends to become a legalistic sledgehammer or the mere plaything of the theologians, ultimately killing the genuine striving for truth and preparing for the inroads of pluralism. The only solution to this dilemma is to return to the biblical understanding of truth, which does not divide between the person of the Creator and Savior and His teachings. The only solution is the return to *wholistic* theology.

2. We should not be afraid to declare with humble boldness that there is indeed something like absolute truth. The relativistic philosophy which is so pervasive in today’s society either denies the existence of absolute truth, i.e., truth

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<sup>26</sup> J. Stephen Lang, “Is Ignorance Bliss?” *Moody* (January/February 1996): 13 (emphasis his). William C. Placher, “Why bother with theology?,” *Christian Century* 111/4 (1994): 104, concurs: “Theology has a bad reputation in most Christian churches these days—it’s regarded as obscure, hard to understand, irrelevant, a bit of a joke. Congregations want pastors or priests who are good counselors, good administrators, good preachers.”

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Taylor as quoted in Lang, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph M. Stowell, “Dealing With the ‘D-Word,’” *Moody* (January/February 1996): 6.

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that surpasses time and space and is therefore universally valid, or seriously questions man's capability of grasping it. For many the former is dependent on the latter: if the human mind cannot know absolute truth, it is essentially non-existent. Others would still allow for absolute truth somewhere "out there" while refuting the idea of being able to know what it is.

The Christian claim to exclusive and absolute truth rests on the claim of divine revelation in the person of Jesus Christ and in the inspired Word of God in Scripture. The concept of divine inspiration "commits the believer to the view that these texts are the word of God, they are normative for religious belief, and that what the texts tell us is *true*."<sup>29</sup> It has to be acknowledged, of course, that in order to arrive at some reasonable and consistent knowledge of the truth on the basis of Scripture, sound hermeneutical guidelines for its interpretation have to be adopted. These should be in harmony with the basic self-claim of the Scriptures of being God's Word. Therefore, theories of interpretations that are based on the principle of doubt and other critical assumptions fall short in this endeavor.<sup>30</sup>

It should be noted that in Jesus Christ and Scripture, which testifies of Him (John 5:39), man has received a divine revelation that enables him to know truth as it is. Since man is trapped in sinful finality he will never be able on this earth to come to an exhaustive and comprehensive knowledge of truth. Neither is there any room for an arrogant triumphalism that forgets to humbly recognize that sinful beings are saved by grace. However, this should not lead to the assumption that truth cannot be known at all or that there is no absolute and universal truth. Through the acceptance of Jesus Christ and His word it is possible to know the truth and embrace the genuine freedom that it brings, in contrast to the idea of the autonomous freedom of the mind.

For a knowledge of the truth both are essential: a personal acquaintance with the person of Jesus Christ by accepting Him as the incarnated Word of God and as a personal savior, and also a submission to the authority of the inscripturated Word of God in the Bible. Both testify to the absolute truth. Only if, according to Jesus, "His word abides in you" can His truth be known. This wholistic truth (Jesus and Scripture) has to be received by wholistic man (body, mind and soul). However, in humble recognition of his finality, man should admit that unless he is willing to be initiated into the truth by the One who is the truth, he cannot grasp it.

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<sup>29</sup> Terry O'Keeffe, "Religion and Pluralism," *Philosophy and Pluralism*, ed. David Archard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 65.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed treatment of proper hermeneutical guidelines see Richard M. Davidson's "Interpreting Scripture: An Hermeneutical Decalogue," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 4/2 (Autumn 1993): 95-114.

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3. If our mind—be in “old” or “new”—is to grasp biblical and divine truth, it is dependent on the only One who can say of Himself: “I am the truth” (John 14:6), and He is also the One who proclaims truth and helps the human mind to grasp it. “For the knowledge of Christ as the Truth, one is dependent on the Holy Scriptures. This knowledge can be appropriated only if one repents and turns to God, who forgives sins, and if one lives as God wants” (see John 7:17)<sup>31</sup> The very fact that Christ as God is the Truth should make us humble enough to realize that our finite reason is limited, that “spiritual realities elude the reach of human logic alone, that we must be dependent upon the revelation of God’s Word—not our twisted, fallen minds—to discern the truths of an infinite God.”<sup>32</sup> When Jesus quoted from Deut 6:4, 5 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might,” he chose to add: “with all your mind” (Mark 12:30). This would mean that our “whole educational enterprise . . . should be caught up in the desire to love God with all of the mind.”<sup>33</sup> In concrete terms it means that because of human sinfulness, which also affects the mind (Eph 2:3), “sinful reason stands in need of conversion just as the rest of man needs to be renewed. Human beings become truly ‘reasonable’ in the biblical sense when ‘we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor 10:5, NASB).”<sup>34</sup>

At this point I would like to add some practical suggestions:

4. We should never be intimidated by the faulty logic and inconsistency of the new mind. Too often we have given in to the psychological pressure that young minds can put on those who believe in “traditional” or “orthodox” doctrines. We have a wonderful wholistic system of truth to share which is tremendously relevant to the needs of young and old alike. Any notion of an inferiority complex on our part is out of place. Moreover, we should not be overly intrigued by ideas that many times are not much more than the processing of a person’s own biographical past.

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<sup>31</sup> Hendrik M. Vroom, *Religions and the Truth: Philosophical Reflections and Perspectives*, trans. J. W. Rebel (Grand Rapids, MI/Amsterdam: Eerdmans/Editions Rodopi, 1989), 240.

<sup>32</sup> Veith, 140.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-145. He adds: “The whole process of curiosity, questioning, and discovery can be a journey, full of wonder and praise, into the mind of God, who created everything. Whatever can be studied, whether human nature or the physical universe, is what it is because God willed it and made it. To uncover the hidden laws that govern matter, to disclose the patterns of subatomic particles, to discover how human beings grow and interact, to discern an underlying pattern in history or in astronomy—all of these amount to nothing less than discovering God’s will. Just as God is inexhaustible, knowledge is inexhaustible. Our curiosity and understanding can never be fully satisfied in our earthly lives. As thirst is evidence for water, our yearning for knowledge points to Heaven, in which all desires will be fully satisfied . . . (1 Corinthians 13:12)” (145).

<sup>34</sup> Frank M. Hasel, “Theology and the Role of Reason,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 4/2 (1993): 184.

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5. We should not take the new mind, or any mind for that matter, as the starting point for our theology or practical living. Sometimes it seems that we have been trying to win the favor of young adults at all costs, even the cost of truth.

6. We should lovingly but consistently bring to bear on the mind the clear orientation of biblical authority. It is true that many times young people have had to witness gross inconsistencies on the part of the preceding generations, and their sensors are finetuned to pick up any such dichotomies. In typical youthful zeal they tend to throw the baby out with the bathwater. However, we have to educate them that it is not fair to use these faults of others as an argument to discard traditional truths and values altogether. We have to demonstrate consistency in our own lives and give ample evidence that to follow the biblical mandates is to have life in its fulness.

7. We should work towards the conversion of the mind and not only the conversion of the heart. This can be done by lovingly accepting the young adult as he or she is. After all, the current generation is “a generation dominated by technology, half of them are divorced, one in three were abused, and it is the most aborted generation ever.”<sup>35</sup> By God’s grace and personal contact it will be possible to see converted hearts *and* minds.

8. We should teach our children from their earliest days that what is true is more important than what is relevant. We should also tell them that truth may not appear relevant at first sight, but will reveal its relevancy to the honest and serious seeker.

9. We must always be aware of the fact that biblical truth and Adventist faith and practice form a counter-culture to the prevalent culture and its subsets. This is especially true for the subculture of the young, which is characterized by MTV, substance abuse, and a deterioration of moral values. If we cave in to their ideas, which are clearly shaped by that culture, we are in danger of losing the contours of our distinct Adventist worldview and lifestyle practice, which are superior to anything this world can offer.

10. We should never give up in our attempt to demonstrate how a consistent biblical lifestyle can help change the mind. Abstinence from certain practices can work wonders. The information overload has to be reduced. This would provide the space for something that is not too popular among the young but nevertheless very essential: the need to think about and reflect one’s ideas and actions. The new mind does not like to think, because it is busy with processing the information overload and therefore does not find it easy to judge and evaluate. We have to challenge young minds with the idea that the Creator has given

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<sup>35</sup> Norman R. Gulley, “The Fall of Athens and the Challenge of Postmodernity,” Unpublished Paper, 15.

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them the ability to think, and they should use it to their own good. It is simply too cheap to live without reflection on how one should live. Anyone who is waiting lives differently. We profess to be waiting for Jesus Christ to return and take us home. If we are truly waiting, we will live differently.

**Conclusion**

We have seen that we are faced with a daunting and challenging task. The challenge and the task can be summarized in this way:

1. Information overload and postmodern thinking have bred a new mind which is less and less capable of grasping biblical truth. Logical and consistent thinking have become more and more difficult, and the new mind is less able to evaluate in a wholistic fashion the information that is being processed. The increasing lack of emotional intelligence leaves the frightening prospect of people who have high IQs but very little good judgment to cope with life and its complex issues.

2. All of this has a tremendous impact on the way biblical and Adventist truth and values are processed and evaluated. The new mind, together with the new relativistic and pluralistic philosophy of the *Zeitgeist*, is less willing to humbly accept truth from divine revelation. The growing suspicion towards institutionalized Christianity and the emphasis on the relevancy of faith rather than on its truth make it hard for the younger generation to take the Bible and its claims seriously. The frequent inability to see the total sum of all the facets and thus the uniqueness of the Adventist message leads to a deplorable shallowness in the understanding of what Adventism is all about.

3. The challenge that is posed by the new mind can be met by the faithful adherence to the clear truth of Jesus Christ and His word. The following counsel by Vernon Grounds sums it all up very well:

It is our privileged task, our holy task, our awesome task, to guard his [Jesus'] truth zealously and transmit it without adulteration to our own generation and on to many generations that may follow us. Obviously we are unable to do this by ourselves. We can only do it by prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit and with sincerest humility. We can do this only as we entreat the Holy Spirit to lead us personally into a deepening understanding of that truth. For it is only as the truth enlightens our minds, possesses our hearts, and is incarnated in our lives that we can perform this task. And above all, we must be willing to stand rocklike in the midst of the truth-denying, truth-adulterating currents of our day. We must try prayerfully not to become bigots and yet meekly endure the accusation of bigotry. We must try prayerfully not to be fanatics and yet meekly endure the accusation of fanaticism. We must try prayerfully not to be narrow-minded and yet meekly endure the accusation of narrow-mindedness. As trustees of God's truth we must exercise our Spirit-guided judg-

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ment as to what teaching, what doctrine and what theology is not in alignment with God's truth, pointing out where it deviates from the Biblical norm. Prayerfully we must guard ourselves against pharasaic self-righteousness and proud exclusivism. . . .

Prayerfully we must guard ourselves against becoming overly judgmental, labeling individuals who do not agree with us in every jot and tittle of theology as heretics as if we were in a position to pass sentence on their motives. We must nevertheless serve God faithfully as trustees of his truth. And in doing that, despite the heavy burden of our responsibility, we will experience the blessing of living in the light, the joy and the hope of God's truth, the truth that makes us free indeed.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Vernon Grounds, "The Truth about Truth," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38/2 (1995): 228.